

# Life of the Spirit

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## CONTENTS:

### VOCAL AND MENTAL PRAYER

Ferdinand Valentine, O.P. 65

'WELCOME SISTER PAIN' M. T. Parnell 69

### PROFITENTES UNITATEM

Text 73

Translation Walter Shewring 74

### A PARISH PRIEST ON LITURGICAL DEVOTION

Arthur Valentin 76

THE SCALE Conrad Pepler, O.P. 78

IS MYSTICISM NORMAL? H. C. Graef 84

THE 'DE IMITATIONE' John Searle 87

### THE BASIS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE Discussion

Bruno S. James 92

REVIEWS 95

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## Life of the Spirit

A review devoted to the theology and practice of prayer and the spiritual life, it is designed to assist in the re-establishment of the Catholic tradition of ascetical and mystical writing in the English language. Contributors are therefore encouraged to submit original MSS. or translations from the Fathers.

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# Life of the Spirit

Vol. I

SEPTEMBER 1946

No. 3

## VOCAL AND MENTAL PRAYER

BY

FERDINAND VALENTINE, O.P.

PRAYER is the uplifting of the human personality to God. We not only uplift our minds by submission through Faith to his revealed truth, and our wills in acknowledgment of his divine sovereignty, *but also our bodies*. In prayer the whole man 'empties himself' in union with our Saviour to the glory of God. (Phil. 2; 7-11.)

'*But also our bodies.*' 'The antithesis of mind is body,' writes Father Vincent McNabb, and therefore 'the antithesis to mental prayer should be bodily prayer. But by a figure of speech the whole range of non-mental prayer is called after its chief part, vocal prayer. It would be incorrect to think that the other forms of bodily prayer are neither greatly practised in the Church nor greatly valued. The Church, like her divine Spouse, "knows what is in man" too well to neglect any object or function whereby the impact of the world may be deadened and a new force added to the world of unseen realities. Even as the Church in her sacred ceremonies sanctions and uses the five outward senses as avenues of approach for divine ideas, so also does she make use of all the communicative organs of the body as channels of intercourse and intercession with God. To her the body of man is . . . a life partner of the soul, and, in the sacramental dispensation, a divinely ordained channel of grace. In active recognition of this principle, the Church uses many forms of bodily prayer. . . . She signs the forehead, lips, and heart. She bows the head. She strews ashes upon the brow. In the solemn worship of the Mass bodily prayer of almost every form is pressed into the service of her emotions or petitions. The eyes of the priest are raised towards heaven or cast down on the Sacred Host, his hands are now outstretched, now joined together, now laid gently upon the altar beside the host. And on days of solemn fast and intercession her sacred ministers cast themselves upon the ground, and there, with their face to the dust, acknowledge their own sins and the sins of the people. What the Church thinks well to do, her children may well imitate, if not in public, at least in private, when the spirit of bodily prayer stirs their hearts'. (*The Science of Prayer*, p. 50.)

Prayer becomes vocal, that is, exterior or 'bodily', from three causes:

343188

(1) When it is made in common. If public prayer is to ascend as one voice to God it must have vocal and exterior expression. There is no other means of uniting the prayer of the faithful except through outward signs.

(2) In private prayer, in order to excite devotion or to express its overflow. St Augustine says: 'When people are praying their bodily attitudes are those of suppliants: they bend the knee, stretch out their hands, even prostrate on the ground or perform similar visible actions. But God knows their invisible wills and their hearts' intentions; nor does he need those external signs, for example, that a person should stretch out his hands. Yet by means of such actions a person does stir himself to pray and to lament more humbly and with greater fervour. I do not know how it is but though such bodily actions can only be due to mental acts that precede, it is yet a fact that by the repetition of such visible, external actions, the interior visible movement that produced them is thereby increased, and those affections, which had to precede if those actions were to be performed, grow by the very fact that they were so performed'. (*De Cura pro Mortuis*. cf. also *Summa Theol.* 2. 2; 83; 12.)

This same truth was expressed by St Francis of Sales as follows: 'We sometimes begin to eat to get an appetite, but the appetite being excited, we continue to eat to content it'. (*Treatise on the Love of God*. Bk. 6, Ch. 3.)

(3) In token of the complete offering of soul and body. 'So that man may serve God with all that he has from God, that is to say, not only with his mind, but also with his body'.

Exterior vocal prayer is the elevation of the mind and will to God, in so far as it expresses on the one hand an inward attention to prayer and on the other the intention to pray which persists as long as the exterior signs of word and gesture continue. This will perhaps be more clearly understood through the following division. Three kinds of attention are possible in exterior vocal prayer whereby it may be said to be mental prayer:

(a) *Attention to the correct articulation of the words, etc.* For example, in the Divine Office, the Rosary, and the words and rubrics of the Mass. Religious Sisters, and others, who have little Latin are sometimes obliged by rule to recite the Divine Office; Cantors at liturgical services cannot always follow the meaning of the words they sing when busy with the chant. These and many others should bear in mind that they are offering to God an attentive and meritorious prayer. Cardinal Cajetan, commenting on this form of attention, remarks: 'He who thinks it more in keeping with his lack of competence to attend merely to the accurate recital of the words, and perseveres in this form of attention, should use it only as a means to God; for if he is, in this way, disposed to better things, God may have mercy on him and give him a higher kind of attention'. (*Commentary on S.T.* 2-2; 83; 13.)



This means he should recite the words accurately, not for the sake of accuracy, or mere liturgical perfection, but for God's sake.

(b) *Attention to the meaning of the words.* Not only to the meaning of the words, but also to the meaning of the words *plus* their ceremonial forms. Let us examine this second kind of attention in its relation to private *vocal* prayer purely and simply.

Private vocal prayer—that is, 'saying prayers'—is of two kinds: the vocal prayer we say 'out loud' with the voice, and the vocal prayer we say 'to ourselves' in the aural imagination (cf. *S.T.* I; 34; 1). Both these kinds of private prayer consist of a repetition of words expressing certain ideas, as, for example, when we read a prayer-book. The set, stereotyped words or acts limit and circumscribe the ideas so that when we say a particular vocal prayer we give expression to a thought, as, for example, in the Our Father. We see at once that although the words circumscribe the prayer, they are also a kind of gateway. Words can increase in number; they can also deepen in meaning—become fuller, more spacious, pregnant with a thousand associations, the synthesis of every thought and deed of a loving heart, of a mind informed by God's truth and of a life surrendered to God's will. The words, 'Our Father', would mean one thing to the Christian neophyte and another, though not a different thing, say, to a St Francis of Assisi. Or to take a more homely example, is there not something unforgettable in the simple words, 'Holy Mary, Mother of God', heard from the lips of an old and devoted client of our Lady?

For this reason vocal prayer leads many souls to contemplation. It isn't what they say, but the meaning released by what they say, which floods their souls. Simple prayer like the idea is fecund. But it is not the thinker *qua* thinker who finds its content, but the lover; just as it is the great thinker who is lost in the process of thinking about God but only the great lover who is lost in the thought of God. It is the God we lovingly know and serve whom we find in prayer. (Cf. *Holy Wisdom*—Baker, p. 347.) 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them; he it is that loveth me. And he that loveth me shall be loved by my Father: and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.' (John 14: 21.) (Cf. *Way of Perfection*, Chapter XVI. Also with reference to the importance of vocal prayer—*Scale of Perfection*—Hilton, pp. 40-1; *Treatise on Heroic Virtue*—Benedict XIV, Vol. 1, p. 240 seq.)

(c) *The attention to the end or purpose of prayer.*<sup>1</sup> This attention explains the influence of vocal prayer, especially exterior vocal prayer, on many souls. Usually at prayer we try to keep our minds

<sup>1</sup>This attention becomes prayer in virtue of the effective intention to offer it to God. Prayer need not, however, be attentive throughout. A right intention formulated at the beginning of prayer (if not afterwards withdrawn) renders the whole prayer meritorious. For this reason we recite the Morning Offering which makes the actions of the day meritorious, even when the mind is pre-occupied with other things.

on what we are saying, but in this prayer words become the *vehicle of attention* quite irrespective of their meaning. For example, who has failed to notice the facility with which the Rosary takes devout souls into contemplation. They finger beads mechanically, mutter prayers subconsciously in an ordered and rhythmic repetition: their minds are taken to God through these things. The technique of the Rosary does not interfere with their attention to God but safeguards and stimulates it.

Father Baker tells us that the 'Ancients', that is, the Fathers of the Desert, however learned they might be, began their spiritual course with vocal prayer which consisted of the psalter recited at least once a day. Through this vocal prayer they were led to contemplation. They had many other helps—perfect solitude, silence, recollection, freedom from worldly cares, and the faithful practice of mortification; but the fact remains that they passed straight from vocal to contemplative prayer. When unable to contemplate, they returned to vocal prayer.

We often read of the numberless *Paters, Aves*, and aspirations recited daily by the saints and holy people, as, for instance, Father William Doyle in our own time. We may have smiled tolerantly at 'ejaculations' counted by their thousand; we may even have condemned such 'parrot-like' repetition as useless, unreasonable, and degrading. If so, were we not forgetting that these vocal prayers provide a medium or vehicle for contact-with-God and often lead to contemplation? Those who pray with this attention do not seek the *meaning* of the words but their *purpose*—divine wisdom itself. 'Moreover', says St Thomas, 'this attention whereby the mind is fixed on God, is sometimes so strong that the mind forgets all other things.' (*S.T.* 2-2; 83; 13) Cardinal Cajetan adds this remark in his commentary: 'He who strives as he recites the whole of Divine Office to rest in loving-attention to God and divine things fully satisfies his obligation'.

All this must not lead us to the false conclusion that we pray always and necessarily with one or other of these attentions. It would be more correct to say that we use all three but with varying degrees of emphasis on one or the other according to our manner of prayer and the measure of our spiritual progress. This will be clear to anyone who reflects for a moment on the way he recites the Rosary.

'It cannot be denied,' says Father Baker, 'that for those whom vocal prayer, accompanied by some exercise of virtue (for without the latter no kind of prayer will be efficacious), is sufficient to bring to contemplation, no way is easier or more secure; none less injurious to head and health or less exposed to delusions.' But he ends on this note of warning: 'Few souls attain to contemplation or spiritual prayer, without the help of some purely mental prayer, seriously and industriously pursued'. (*Inner Life of Dame Gertrude More*, Chapter VIII.)



## 'WELCOME SISTER PAIN' (II)

BY

MARY-TERESA PARNELL

I PASS on now to *Mental* pain which is a condition of the *soul*, and yet I do not wish to put this under the category of actual *Spiritual Pain*, because I wish to reserve for that category the pain which is entirely due to the actual intervention of God directly, and not due to the 'growing pains' of the soul.

We are probing deeper now into the mystery of pain, probing deeper, and at the same time, paradoxically, mounting higher. I speak of the condition of the soul caused by the mental pain of aridity, isolation, desolation, and the insatiable hunger of the soul for God.

*Aridity* is dryness in the life of the spirit. It sometimes seems as if the very *colour*, and *music*, of prayer were dead and silent. We pray, and our very words seem meaningless and hollow; there seems no response from God. We may be even utterly bored and unable to concentrate; vocal prayer seems meaningless, like speaking to a blank wall; mental prayer is impossible. It is indeed as if all the colour of life had turned grey, and all the music was mute. 'Surely', the wretched soul cries out, 'I must have sinned very greatly, have displeased God in some terrible way.' Not at all, as a matter of fact you have been found pleasing to God, so pleasing, that he is trusting you to follow him without the light and the consolations you have hitherto found so sweet.

This state of aridity is common at times to all who are striving to live the Life of the Spirit. It is the beginning in the growth in holiness. It may be an intermittent pain, one which comes and goes with some frequency. It may on the other hand be of long duration, so that each day is a weariness, a veritable 'Way of the Cross'. It is the testing of our faith, of our fortitude; it is often the prelude to an even greater pain, *isolation*, which in itself is the prelude to *desolation*, and the insatiable hunger of the soul for God.

All this *Mental Pain*, which is involved in the very growth of the soul in holiness, and ultimately in union with Christ, is understandable if we consider it as a means of making us really and actually sharers of his sufferings, and one with him. We could never be wholly his, unless step by step we follow him in suffering and in love.

First, then, we must know the aridity of being 'earth-bound', aridity which shows us how utterly dependent we are on him for any light in the soul; we are unable, being so much of the earth, earthy, to feel or know of ourselves anything of spiritual beauty or consolation.

So our blessed Lord sends (and here we see the difference between the pain of physical disease which he never sends but only permits) the mental pain of aridity to test our sincerity and fortitude. It is for us humbly to accept the burden, and offer it up to him in glad acceptance and thanksgiving for past consolations, and also as a mortification and disciplining of the soul, which loves the sweetnesses and consolations of religion, but shrinks from the hard and flinty 'Way of the Cross'.

*Aridity* is hard, but *isolation* and *desolation* are an agony undreamed of save by those privileged souls whom our blessed Lord deems ready to bear it. Only those who have known that isolation of mind and spirit when the soul is, as it were, 'a sparrow, alone upon the house-top', a creature in the midst of the turmoil of a busy life, who is yet internally withdrawn into the wilderness of the spirit, where neither man nor, it seems, God can penetrate the gloom, only they can gauge the horror and the pain of the Garden and the Cross. That awful 'alone-ness', even in the crowd, that isolation of spirit which leads on to the utter desolation and darkness. In vain the soul tries to penetrate the gloom, in vain do the halting phrases of well-known prayers stumble from dry lips. This is not aridity, not just dullness or boredom, this is agony, the beating of bleeding hands against an impenetrable wall, the dull throbbing of a heart which is so fearful it has ceased to be conscious even of love or desire; only fear, and darkness, and the 'alone'. Then truly is that soul privileged to share the long darkness and agony of the Garden, and as the darkness deepens, of that cry from the Cross: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'

At the time of the great darkness, of the utter desolation, we cannot realize perhaps the immense experience. Could we, the experience would not be so intense and deep. All we can say is, 'My God, why?' But still '*My God.*' To that we cling in the darkness, holding on to the great Truth with trembling hands, but still holding on.

And then we know, when the deepest darkness is penetrated by the grey light that preludes the dawn, when the throbbing of the fear-tormented heart calms down once more to the beat of conscious love and desire, that the agony and pain of that experience has done more to unite our soul with him, our puny heart with his Sacred Heart, than any sweet consolations or joyful 'uplift' we have ever known in our past life. And with trembling lips we can say, 'Welcome Sister Pain,' yes, even the pain of desolation and darkness, which has knit my soul more closely to his.

Then there sometimes follows in the 'light before the dawn' the grey glimmer that follows the darkness, the pain of *insatiable desire*.

It seems he is always so near, and yet so far; so desirable, yet so unattainable. He seems even to call us, and we seem to find



only 'an emptiness and void.' We are restless, hungry and thirsty for him; prayer is possible, perhaps even prolific, but there is always a mist between the soul and God, a mist, not a stone wall of desolation, a mist through which the soul peers, waiting for the light to break.

God is so beautiful, so utterly desirable, and the mental pain of hunger and thirst for him grows in intensity until it becomes an agony of nostalgia. 'I know no comfort or delight in all the world, save thee.' He seems so remote, and so utterly lovable.

And so the pain continues, the pain of nostalgia of the lover when the Beloved is removed from conscious sight; the pain of nostalgia of the lover, whose only desire is union with the Beloved.

Such pain, though real, intense, agonizing, is wholly desirable. 'Lord, I offer to thee the agony of my soul which longs only for thee.' Who would not say to such pain, 'Welcome Sister Pain'?

This, the pain of insatiable hunger of the soul for God, is very near to that Spiritual Pain of which I will speak next, because it is a wholly desirable pain.

'I wish to suffer,' cried St Teresa, 'because thou, O Lord, hast suffered; and may it never be the pleasure of thy Majesty, that a gift of so high a price as that of thy Love be given to people who serve thee only because of the sweetness they find thereby.'

As we probe the mystery of Pain, from its beginning in the physical, through the mental, and on into what we can only term the purely spiritual, it seems to emerge into something, if not understandable, anyway more acceptable.

So we pass on now to the consideration of *Spiritual Pain*. I call it Spiritual Pain, because although there may be outward and visible signs in the body, the pain itself is the direct gift of God. This pain is so wholly sweet in its poignancy, so entirely free from any defect, or effort or even virtue on our part, that those who have ever experienced it would never have it cease, but would, if they were able, retain that pain as long as they lived.

There have always been certain souls who have experienced so great a pain of love, and of sharing in the sufferings of the Sacred Heart, that they have held such pain to be entirely sweet and lovely. These souls know in that pain such a joy, that they would gladly die of its sweetness. Outstanding instances of such experiences are seen in the Stigmatist, St Francis, in the arrow that pierced the heart of St Teresa, in the agony of sweetness that enlarged the heart of St Philip Neri. But many there are, who in obscurity, and unknown to the world, are visited by this Divine Pain in greater or lesser degree—quite humble and unobtrusive beings, whose only merit is their intense devotion to Jesus, the union of their will with his, and the great desire to share his pain as well as his consolations. To these there may come the experience of sharing the pain of the Sacred Heart over sinners. This experience may happen only once in a lifetime, or perhaps from

time to time it will come; always unsought, unpremeditated. It may come during mental prayer, at Holy Mass, or at some quite unexpected moment, that violent pain, which is so sweet, piercing the very heart with its poignancy.

So intense, and yet so lovely, that the very soul seems to swoon in the sweetness of the pain, which is love. All the desire then of the soul is for that sweet pain to remain for ever, until the soul itself is freed from the body, and finds union in the Divine Love.

Or it may come in lesser degree, and in different form. There may be the sweet pain in hands and feet and side, in the contemplation of a crucifix, or in the reciting of the Sorrowful Mysteries, or just when lifting up the heart and mind in love and adoration.

But this Spiritual Pain, in whatever degree, or in whichever way it comes, comes as the direct gift from God, never from our own seeking or through our own merit or power.

But to those who experience it, it is of all consolations the most sweet. 'I know not whether it were love or pain,' has been said by one who experienced it. And the answer is, 'both.'

One such, in contemplating the Sacred Heart, was so overwhelmed by the sorrow it beheld in it because of sinners, that this soul in its love greatly longed to share some of that pain. Instantly, so piercing a pain pierced this human heart, followed by such sweetness, that the person knew not whether to cry, 'Withhold,' or 'Forever.' 'Welcome Sister Pain' is most truly said by the recipients of this Spiritual Pain.

Under the term Spiritual Pain, I would also include what is so great a mystery, *vicarious* suffering.

To some comes the 'vocation of pain,' the direct call of our blessed Lord to be a *holocaust*, a victim of the Divine Love. This is a very mysterious truth, but such a vocation is as certainly a vocation as that of the priesthood, the religious, or the married state. Such an one knows when our Lord desires this, and he can, as in any other vocation, refuse to answer the call. But if he responds, then only is that man living fully his life and exercising all his powers.

This is not a very usual vocation, but perhaps more are called than *dare* answer the call. I say *dare*, because in answering the call such a soul has, as it were, to abandon itself wholly and without reserve, ready to suffer in body, mind and spirit, as an act of reparation, knit up with our Lord's utter surrender and sacrifice on Calvary. In doing this, the soul no longer has *self-will*, but is flung in entire surrender on the sacrificial altar of the Cross. It needs courage; but more than courage, it needs a very abandonment of love.

Then there is vicarious suffering when the soul offers itself on behalf of another, or others. 'I offer my whole being to thee, Lord. Let me suffer—let me know all the pain so that A. may be spared,



or this soul may be saved. Let me bear in my body the pain that would be his.'

God does not always accept such an offering; but sometimes he does, and in some wonderful way another life is spared, another soul is saved, through the willing pain and suffering of this suppliant. How joyful to bear pain, even death, that some soul may be saved, or some young life freed from disease, or some valuable and useful individual, more valuable and useful than oneself, may be preserved for his or her work!

Who would not say, 'Welcome Sister Pain' under such circumstances?

The problem of pain, looking at it as we have tried to look at it, tracing its fruitfulness from the lowest physical to the highest spiritual pain, presents no real stumbling-block to the Christian. It can be *salutary, reparative, the means of union with Jesus*. It may be a foretaste of purgatory, or the promise of heaven. It is all a question of, 'Am I ready to accept it in these ways, or am I indignant, rebellious, despondent, whining?'

Christ, the Lamb without spot, suffered *Pain* because of *sin*. Can I, who falter after him, who am so sin-stained, expect to be immune? No, should pain and suffering come my way, let me rather hold out both hands, and say, 'Welcome Sister Pain,' accept, offer up, and let its power be the means of closer union with our blessed Lord, in the sharing of his Passion.

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## PROFITENTES UNITATEM

### Sequence for the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity

THIS sequence is one of the many which were current in the Middle Ages but which have been removed from the Missal now used. It has been transcribed from the 13th century MS. Dominican Gradual preserved in the library at Blackfriars, Oxford. It was written by Adam of S. Victor and may be consulted in Digby Wrangham, *The Liturgical poetry of Adam of St Victor* (1881 vol. i, pp. 130-134); there he inserts an extra stanza before the last.

Profitentes unitatem veneremur trinitatem pari reverentia;  
 Tres personas asserentes personali differentes a se differentia.  
 Hae dicuntur relative cum sint unum substantive, non tria  
 principia.  
 Sive dicas tres vel tria, simplex tamen est ousia, non triplex  
 essentia.  
 Simplex esse, simplex posse, simplex velle, simplex nosse, cuncta  
 sunt simplicia.  
 Pater, proles, sacrum flamen, deus unus, et hi tamen habent  
 quaedam propria.  
 Non unius quam duarum sive trium personarum minor efficacia;  
 Una virtus, unum numen, unus splendor, unum lumen, hoc tamen  
 quod alia.  
 Patri proles est aequalis, nec hoc tollit personalis amborum  
 distinctio;  
 Patri compar filioque, spiritualis ab utroque procedit connexio.  
 Non humana ratione capi possunt hae personae nec harum  
 discretio.  
 Non hic ordo temporalis, non hic situs aut localis rerum  
 circumscriptio.  
 Nil in deo praeter deum, nulla causa praeter eum qui creat causalia;  
 Effectiva vel formalis causa deus et finalis, sed nunquam materia.  
 Digne loqui de personis vim transcendit rationis, excedit ingenia.  
 Quid sit gigni, quid processus, me nescire sum professus, sed fide  
 non dubia.  
 Nos in fide gloriemur, nos in una modulemur fidei constantia;  
 Trine sit laus unitati, sit et simple trinitati coeterna gloria. Amen.

## PROFITENTES UNITATEM

Translated by WALTER SHEWRING

Affirming God both One and Three,  
 To either name we bend the knee,  
 The onefold or the threefold name.  
 Three Persons here are understood,  
 Distinct in very personhood  
 But in all attributes the same.

In One by substance, faith describes  
 Three by relation inwardwise;  
 One Principle they are of all.  
 Name them *The Three* or *Persons Three*,  
 Nothing that severs unity  
 Within their essence pure can fall.



One being, will, wisdom and might  
Have they; of each with equal right  
Every perfection is proclaimed.  
Father and Word and Paraclete  
Are but one God, and yet with meet  
Especial title each is named.

If One, if Two regarded be,  
Nothing is shorn of deity  
In power and glory, depth and height;  
Alike almighty and divine,  
The Three with single radiance shine;  
Their light is godhead, godhead light

The Word the Father's equal is,  
Nor does the Sonship that is his  
Lesser to loftier state oppose;  
Equal to Father and to Son,  
The Spirit, Lord, Life-giving one  
From both ineffably outflows.

Never shall subtlest wit of man  
That union and distinction span  
Or outrun faith and seize the how;  
Yet banish thought of time and space,  
Distance dividing place from place,  
Succession sundering then from now.

Nothing but God in God may be,  
No cause be found save only he  
From whom all modes of causes flow.  
God as exemplar may be cause,  
As will that shapes, as end that draws;  
As warp and woof of things, not so.

What in themselves the Persons are  
Lies beyond reach and utterance far;  
The Son eternally begot,  
The still-proceeding mutual Love  
Are past our knowledge and above;  
Faith holds the truth she visions not.

In faith our music was begun;  
In faith's triumphant unison  
Let every singer end his lays.  
To the undivided Trinity  
And to the threefold Oneness be  
Co-equal co-eternal praise.

# A PARISH PRIEST ON LITURGICAL DEVOTION

By

ARTHUR VALENTIN

THE subject of Liturgy is so vast that only a few can command a deep knowledge of its history, but there is one aspect which does not call for high scholarship, and that is the pastoral—the Liturgy as it affects the average Catholic, especially as his normal means of instruction.

By general agreement these days in which we live have witnessed a general falling away from Bible reading amongst non-Catholics, whilst that practice has not been a strong point amongst English Catholics; then, too, only a small fraction of our people ever hear a sermon, for most come only once to church on a Sunday, and then to a Low Mass, at which they hear only the usual notices. Few in proportion to the sum total study Catholic books on religion, and so thousands have starved minds, a condition responsible in large measure for so much apathy. Apathy is the inevitable prostration of will which follows on after a long period of mental starvation. Now, in the Liturgy, and I am here using that term as equalling the Mass, we have an unequalled book of instruction, and the finest comment ever produced on the meaning of Holy Scripture. The Liturgy is great drama, and the lines spoken are largely those of inspired Scripture; not only that, but passages of Scripture are so related as to constitute a most moving drama, with all the added gain of fitting scenery—the actions and ceremonies of the Mass. Even just to watch a Mass is a spiritually satisfying experience, and there are times when we may be too tired to do anything else.

Take, for instance, the story of the Epiphany; it is fine reading just as a tale, as we find it in the gospel of St Matthew, but how enormously that incident gains in meaning and vitality when seen represented in the great mystery play of the Mass! How the various liturgical pieces of the feast, such as the epistle, add to the reality of the presentation of the Gospel story. The *Gloria* brings in the note of Bethlehem; the incense, at a sung Mass, the offering of the frankincense; the genuflexions at the consecration living again those words: 'and falling down, they adored him.'

Take, again, the Lenten Masses, how day by day the epistles and gospels form an exquisite comment on Scripture: the epistle, or lesson, often being prophecy in action, and the fulfilment shown in the Gospel that follows. So with the special masses for saints; at least the better constructed ones are redolent of the saint—as can be seen from a study of the Mass for St Thérèse of the Infant Jesus; so, too, the votive Masses.

If only we can get this wealth of teaching across the altar rails



to our congregations—that is one of the most urgent problems of today. I must avoid raising any contentious issue in this article, so I refrain from offering any suggestion as to *how*, but can anyone deny that this is a really critical matter in these days when the Church is fighting for her children's souls a very grim battle indeed?

The Mass, then, can reveal our Lord to us better, so I believe, than any other way, for the Mass unfolds to us that Christian year which is none other than a dramatized re-presentation of the human life of our Saviour; not only that, but also an opening of heavenly windows to show us the ascended and reigning Christ in his glory. All Catholics know from experience the truth of this, as our memories of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, etc. prove. In and through the Liturgy the tremendous facts indicated by those feast-names become vivid and vital contemporary happenings; we their eye-witnesses and participants.

And there is another aspect of the Liturgy I have found personally of the greatest help, in addition to the joys I have already indicated. I suppose most of us at times fearfully question the reality of our love for our Lord. Perhaps we can say with simple reality that we are trying to do his will, and therein lies true love; but we do long to have more *awareness* of the love we hope we possess, an enlisting of our God-given emotions as well as the discipline of our will. I do not think anything so answers to this desire as the Liturgy. I have already referred to the glow and beauty of the great feasts. How enchanting, for example, the simple ceremonies of Candle-Mass Day—the little procession of, it may be, a priest, a few servers, and a handful of faithful (why do so many churches omit this procession?), and the twinkling of the tapers in that procession and at various portions of the Mass. Just a delightful re-living of that first Candle-Mass procession of the Holy Family, with the coming into the temple of the Light of the World, and the little gathering of devout people—Simeon and Anna.

If we train our minds and hearts to this awareness we can discover unsuspected evidence of our love for God. I know, for example, if I may be forgiven talking about myself, how one is conscious of a sudden delight in seeing a few extra candles gleaming on our Lady's altar or shrine on one of her feasts. Our Lady has been remembered—and the heart rejoices. Is not that experience definite evidence that the soul thus moved is so affected because it loves? Some may say: Oh, but that may be true of a priest especially fond of the Liturgy, but you surely don't expect that sort of thing amongst simple, ordinary folk? Well, I am a retired parish priest, with a long experience of the effects of liturgical training on average Catholics, and I can say definitely that no class of people show greater appreciation of the Liturgy than

working-class men and women. I can see now the fine old face of an army pensioner lit up with joy as he said to me after some rite: 'A lovely service, Father, a lovely service!' Recently, after the Candle-Mass rites in a little chapel, a working man was talking about his delight in witnessing them for the first time for days after the event; the simple rite had brought a glow of happiness into his work-days. No priest will ever regret taking pains in carrying out these rites, no matter how limited the resources at his command. Let there be reverence in the sanctuary, and a sustained personal enthusiasm for the Liturgy as a *spiritual reality*, a vital contact with Christ our High Priest, and our people will respond. Mere attention to rubrics and liking for ritual leads to formalism and sheer boredom, but the true appreciation of the meaning of the Liturgy never loses its power to delight and to sanctify. I end by stressing the importance of teaching our people by example, and not only by sermons, the joy of Liturgy's chief purpose—the worshipping of God. The first tribute of the Gentile Wise Men was the giving of adoration, and every day can be a renewal of that mutual epiphany—Christ showing himself with love and tenderness, and we showing in return our humble devotion. The Feast of Adoration was an occasion of 'great joy,' and those who live in that experience never lack the spirit of Christian joy.

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## THE WAY OF PERFECTION IN THE ENGLISH MYSTICS

BY

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

### III—THE SCALE

Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of the English spiritual authors, some explanation is required of the order and design of the treatment. For we do not intend to follow a chronological order and indeed we have included the Ancren Riwele which is outside our period, as also William Langland who scarcely deserves the name of mystic though he was a great poet and the mystic is often, if not always, a poet too.

Our plan is to climb up the scale, the ladder of perfection, from the lowest rungs to the topmost, where, like Jacob's ladder, they disappear into heaven. The theme of this essay has been adopted from Père Garrigou-Lagrange's now celebrated thesis that the highest flights of infused contemplation and mystical union are on



the royal road to holiness open to all. A scheme therefore of the normal growth of the generous soul cooperating to the full with the graces offered her, will begin with the first conversion and end with the heights of union described in different terminology by St John of the Cross, Mother Julian, and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*.

This growth, as we have already seen, was first embryonically systematised by the pseudo-Denis with the threefold division of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways, or in other words, the beginner, the proficient, and the perfect, which was the more common form of the division in the Middle Ages. St Thomas elaborates the division in terms of the normal physical growth of a man. First comes the infant who is without reason and reacts immediately to its instincts, so in the infancy of the spiritual life the chief concern, the *studium principale*, is the overcoming of concupiscence, the disentangling of one's self from the unreasonable movements of sin—the *recessus a peccato*. At this time charity is to be nourished and fostered, but what is most manifest is the struggle against the evils of sin. Then comes Youth, when reason dawns and the child begins to speak with understanding. Lower instincts become controlled by the higher faculties. And so the soul's chief preoccupation is to progress, to become proficient in good. Charity is strengthened and begins to predominate. Finally with Puberty the youth receives the full use of all his powers and faculties. Thus the soul's chief concern is to possess God and to enjoy him—*ut Deo inhaereat et eo fruatur*. Charity reigns. There are many ways of marking out the same growth, and as with any movement its stages are not fixed and static points on the way, but simply milestones. All the divisions of spiritual growth may, however, be brought under those three headings.<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising that in our own day this simple scheme has become very much more elaborate, far more closely analysed and more detailed measurements given to fill in the distances between the milestones. Already this process was at work in the 14th century. The threefold division crops up in every writer in some form or another. It is almost a major theme of Langland's. But Hilton sets out deliberately to write of the scale itself and is consequently more explicit and detailed than any of the others. Later the Spanish mystics bring further precision, St Teresa with her Mansions and St John of the Cross with his Dark Nights. All this wealth of analysis and discernment in the growth of the soul has been collected and tabulated by many modern authors, but perhaps by none more successfully and comprehensively than by Père Garrigou-Lagrange. For the sake of clarity we may therefore set out here in comparison the 'Scale' as mapped out by Walter Hilton and the 'Three Ways' of Père Garrigou-Lagrange.

1 Cf. St Thomas II-II, 24 art. 9, *corpus* and answers to objections.

### (1) HILTON'S SCALE

Bk. I c. 1.      Turning. Conversion.

- c. 2. { *Active Life*—bodily } fasting, vigils, penance  
              ghostly } help towards contemplation.  
                    ‘To all young beginning men, come newly out of sin to service.’ (Minor Works, p. 4.)
- c. 3. { *Contemplative Life*—‘Perfect love and charity felt inwardly by ghostly virtues and by soothfast knowing of God and ghostly things’.
- c. 4. { (a) *Knowing by Reason*. Natural contemplation. Without affection and savour. Theology, Scholars etc.; for Good and Bad alike. A Good Way, if they keep in meekness and charity, fleeing fleshly sins.
- c. 5. { (b) *Affection without light of understanding*. Burning love in Devotion. Through meditation, feeling of fervour about the Passion. Fervent desires and ghostly delight. But ‘no open sight’ in understanding, nor of mysteries. Tears, Sweet Burning.
- c. 6. { (1) *Lower Degree*—occasionally given also to Actives. A little tasting of the love of God. Comes fitfully according to will of God.
- c. 7. { (2) *Higher Degree*—only for those in great rest of Body and Soul. Rest of heart and cleanness of conscience. Name of ‘*Jesu*’ and *Liturgy* turned to sweet song.
- c. 8. { (c) *Perfect*. Burning love in contemplation.
9. { *Spiritual*. A Tasting in Darkness.  
      { First Reformed by fullness of virtues to the image of Jesus;  
      { And After, when all is purged—illuminated to see by understanding soothfastness—which is God—sweet burning love. Ravishing. Marriage.

The Fullness of this is HEAVEN.



## (2) THE THREE WAYS OF TODAY

## FIRST CONVERSION.

PURGATIVE WAY: { Feeble, slack or retarded with some falls.  
 { Generous, fervent souls.

### *Passive Purification of the Senses.*

ILLUMINATIVE	{	Feeble—Transitory acts of infused Con-	
WAY:		templation.	
	{	Full—	{
			e.g. St Vincent de Paul.
			Contemplative in character.
		Extraordinary:	with visions and
			revelations.

### *Passive Purification of the Spirit.*

**UNITIVE WAY:**

- { Feeble—Union often interrupted.
- { Full—
  - { Ordinary—
    - { Apostolic
    - { Purely Contemplative.
  - { Extraordinary, e.g. Visions of the Trinity.

It is this general scheme that we shall follow in this work and in order that readers may grasp this gradually ascending scale of the growth of the soul in its way to holiness we here set out the scheme in the form of a ladder, which should be read beginning from the bottom of the page:

# GOD



BEATIFIC VISION

PURELY PASSIVE JUDGMENT

FINAL PURIFICATION DEATH

UNIT: FULL EXTRAORDINARY Visions

UNIT: FULL ORDINARY CONTEMPL. ONLY

UNIT: FULL ORDINARY APOSTOLIC

UNITIVE FEEBLE Often Interrupted

PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF SPIRIT

ILL: FULL EXTRAORDINARY. Visions, etc.

ILL: FULL ORDINARY. CONTEMPLATIVE

ILL: FULL ORDINARY ACTIVE

FEEBLE ILLUMINATIVE      Transitory Acts of  
Infused Contemplation

PASSIVE PURGATION OF SENSES

GENEROUS PURGATIVE Fervent

FEEBLE PURGATIVE      Slack. Retarded  
Some Falls

FIRST CONVERSION

# SINNER



The choice of our English spiritual writers follows this, and not the chronological, order. Thus the first author to be discussed is LANGLAND because he shows the way to a first conversion in the midst of social upheaval and unrest, an excellent model for first conversion in the twentieth century. Thence, leaping back practically two centuries, we take the ANCLEN RIWLE, which is hardly more of a mystical document than 'Piers Ploughman'; but this rule lays down a very thorough ascetic doctrine; it shows the early stages of the spiritual life, the love and the virtues characteristic of the Purgative Way. For the higher reaches of the purgative way leading into the Illuminative RICHARD ROLLE's *Amending of Life* provides the best guide. The same author in the *Fire of Love* and his other works describes a state of soul which is very noble but never reaches beyond the Illuminative Way. Here too we may include *Margery Kempe* with all her visions and curious behaviour. For the Unitive Way we are provided with the best literature of the whole period in MOTHER JULIAN's *Revelations* and the CLOUD OF UNKNOWING with its companion volumes. Finally, summarising the whole process and rounding off the list we turn to WALTER HILTON himself. He will help to put all these writers in their allotted places. We cannot be very cut-and-dried in making these allotments. Any forcing into unyielding categories would kill the vitality of their words; but if we follow this scheme it will be seen that the writers do thus fall fairly into these threefold divisions in the manner sketched above. The growth of the spiritual life is the growth of a single individual. Here we have marshalled a small group, each member of which is to take over one section. We trust in the natural power and vitality of their words to master any tendency to artificiality that may arise from this plan.

(To be continued)

ERRATUM: In the previous issue of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, p. 44, in the sentence describing the period of 'The English Mystics': 'Rolle born perhaps ten years before it opened and Mother Julian dying some ten years after its close'.

## IS MYSTICISM NORMAL?

BY

H. C. GRAEF

THE mystic state, surrounded with so much splendour in the lives of the saints—is it really nothing but the ‘normal’ development of the virtues and the gifts? Why, then, do the mystics, a St Bernard, a St Catherine of Siena, a St John of the Cross, seem so different from ourselves? How can the mystical life, which in them abounds in visions, locutions, stigmata and other marvellous experiences, rest on the same principles as our own, devoid of all these things? It would seem to be this consideration that has led many modern theologians and spiritual writers to assume that the mystic state is ‘extraordinary’ in the strict sense, i.e. that it is not in the normal way of sanctity. In fact attempts have been made to divide the spiritual life into two completely separate compartments: the one ascetical and ‘normal’, with an ascetical purgative, illuminative and unitive way, the other mystic and ‘extraordinary’, with the same three ways. There is no necessity to repeat the arguments against this view so convincingly stated by theologians like Saudreau and Garrigou-Lagrange. We would only say that, if this modern theory were true, the unity of the spiritual life, built on the virtues and the gifts, would be broken up, and the traditional teaching of St Thomas, St John of the Cross, and all the older theologians and mystics would have to be at least re-interpreted in a manner entirely different from its commonly accepted meaning.

What is the reason for this change of outlook? If we consider the works of two of the chief modern representatives of the two schools, the Jesuit Père Poulain, and the Dominican Père Garrigou-Lagrange, their different approach to the subject of mysticism is at once obvious. Poulain describes mystic phenomena, Garrigou-Lagrange establishes the theological foundations on which Christian mysticism rests. In other words, one treats the subject as a scientist, the other as a theologian. Now the scientist has to deal with phenomena, he investigates things that can be observed. But the working of grace is invisible, neither the virtues nor the gifts of the Holy Ghost can be seen, heard or handled—therefore the man with the scientific bent of mind will find too little to attract him in these theological conceptions. It is different with the extraordinary phenomena frequently accompanying the mystic state. They afford ample material for the scientist. Even in the lower strata of the mystic life, in the Prayer of Quiet, there is already the ‘ligature’ of the senses, for example the partial inability to move, which becomes more marked in the Prayer of Union. Then there are visions and locutions, and in ecstasy such



striking phenomena as levitation, bilocation, the gift of tears and many other conspicuous graces. But, strangely enough, what attracts the scientist and makes him consider the mystic state as 'extraordinary' in the strict sense, is of comparatively small interest to the theologian. In this respect the latter is a faithful disciple of St Paul, who reprimanded the Corinthians for being too fond of these exciting gifts and who taught them to prefer the edifying ones, and, above all, Charity, the queen of virtues.

The reason for the depreciation of extraordinary phenomena on the part of the theologians is that they are not *gratiae gratum facientes*, but *gratiae gratis datae*, i.e., they are not required for the sanctification of the soul, but given for other purposes, such as the demonstration of the sanctity of their recipient to others, or the conversion of sinners or heretics. Moreover, as they are not supernatural *quoad essentiam* (essentially) but only *quoad modum* (in the way they work) these phenomena may be imitated by the devil, or they may even proceed from nothing higher than a vivid imagination or an hysterical temperament, in which case they are, of course, neither supernatural nor preternatural. For this reason the theologians, though taking account of them, are comparatively little concerned with these external manifestations, and if they investigate them, as St Thomas does in his treatises on prophecy (II-II, 171-174), rapture (*ibid.* 175) and other *gratiae gratis datae*, they do not give descriptions of the phenomena but reduce them to their theological principles, analyzing their essence, cause, relations to the cognitive and appetitive faculties and similar points of philosophical interest. But, being *gratiae gratis datae*, they do not constitute the essence of mysticism, though some of them may frequently accompany it, especially in its higher stages.

There is one more objection made by those who hold that mysticism is something essentially extraordinary, superadded to the ordinary life of grace, and that is the fact that there are so few mystics. We have said that out of the insignificant seed there develop magnificent trees and flowers, and we applied this simile to the spiritual life. But, if this metaphor holds good, why does not grace (to use one of the favourite metaphors of Garrigou-Lagrange) bring forth mystics as frequently as acorns produce oaks? Now, even in the natural sphere seeds do not produce plants and plants do not produce fruits unless placed in congenial soil and given the amount of rain and sunshine they need. Thus unfavourable surroundings and unsuitable direction can go far to prevent the normal development of the germ of grace implanted in the soul at Baptism. Our Lord himself used the parable of the Sower and his good seed, of which yet only the fourth part bore fruit, and even that fourth part not a hundred-fold! The obstacles he mentions in the parable, the interference of Satan, tribulations and persecutions, the cares and allurements of the world, they all enter

into the spiritual life, preventing the full development of grace. For man is endowed with free will. This is the very capacity that makes him fit for the moral and spiritual life, but, and this is the other side of the picture, it can also refuse cooperation with grace, or can cooperate only in a half-hearted manner. Now the mystic life, which is beset with sufferings and temptations, needs the full cooperation of the will, which becomes especially difficult in the two 'Nights' of the senses and of the spirit, the two great crises of the life of contemplation, which mark the transition from the state of beginners to that of proficients and again to that of the perfect. It is especially during these testing times that souls may fall away by their own fault, so that the mystic life is either prevented altogether, or stunted in its growth. It is therefore not surprising that, given all these obstacles of unsuitable surroundings, lack of direction, a particularly 'active' and restless temperament, insufficient generosity, and many others besides, the full mystic life should be very rare here below and appear as something extraordinary, though it is meant to be the normal crown of the Christian life.

And how could it be otherwise, as the supernatural end for which we were created is the contemplation of God in the Beatific Vision and sanctifying grace its beginning here on earth? There is, therefore, almost as much reason to desire the mystical life as there is to desire the Beatific Vision. Its two great effects are a thorough purification from our sins and imperfections, and a corresponding growth in union with God—surely the two things most to be desired by every fervent Christian. Père Poulain himself has proved in his *Grâces d'Oraison* that, excepting the martyrs, all canonised saints, whether belonging to the contemplative, the active or the mixed state, have enjoyed mystic prayer, and normally very exalted forms of it. If, then, it seems almost a prerequisite of heroic virtue, why should we not desire it? Our Lord has said, 'Be ye perfect', and he added, what no human person could have dared to add: 'As your heavenly Father is perfect'. He places before our eyes the perfection of God himself as our supreme ideal and, in another saying, he gives us his own meekness and humility as the pattern we are to follow. Perhaps, if these sayings were less familiar, their boldness would take our breath away—and maybe, also our pusillanimity. We think it presumptuous to aspire to the mystic union—but then what shall we say to our Lord's demands to be as perfect as the Father and as humble as the Son? Should we, like the rich youth, turn back in despair at being presented with such unattainable standards?

God does not demand the impossible. In order to enable us to strive even after divine perfection, he has planted in our hearts a divine seed—the seed of sanctifying grace, and with it the whole supernatural organism of the virtues and the gifts. It is true, we bear this inestimable treasure in earthen vessels, and, by our own

fault, we hardly know that it is there, waiting to unfold itself. We place our light under a bushel, instead of setting it on a candlestick to lighten the household of the faith. 'If thou didst know the gift of God . . . thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. . . .' The mystics have known both the gift and the boundless munificence of the Giver, who desires to bestow it even now as lovingly as he desired it by the well in Samaria. If we but knew the gift of God, and had the confidence of St Paul in him 'who is powerful to do superabundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that operates in us', that is according to the life of grace energizing our whole being if we will but let it do so! If we but knew how to use our supernatural powers, we should also live that mystic union with God, though on a lower plane, that made of a Bernard, a Catherine, a Teresa or a John of the Cross the saints they were, to the glory of God and of the Mystical Body which is the Church.

## THE 'DE IMITATIONE'

By

JOHN SEARLE

THE Bible excepted, no other book in Christendom has circulated so widely as 'The Imitation.' It appeared during one of the darkest hours in European history, between the dead or dying Middle Ages and the alluring dawn of the delusive Renaissance; and as the picturesque Michelet writes: '*L'Imitation de Jésus Christ, le plus beau livre chrétien après l'Evangile, est sorti, comme lui, du sein de la mort. La mort du monde ancien, la mort du moyen âge, ont porté ces germes de vie.*'

The most precious of the early manuscripts is the famous Antwerp Codex written by Thomas himself, with the subscription '*Finitus et completus anno domini MCCCCXLI per manus fratris Thomæ Kempensis in Monte Agnetis prope Zwolles.*' Before the war there were still in existence sixty dated manuscripts of the fifteenth century, and about thirty undated ascribed to that century.

Although the evidence is overwhelming in favour of Thomas à Kempis as the author, after his death other claimants to that great honour were put forward, the most notable being Jean Gerson, Chancellor of Paris. This controversy has been continued intermittently to this day, and even so recently as 1936 the Rev. D. G. Barron published a slim volume upholding Gerson's claim. St Francis de Sales, a great admirer of 'The Imitation,' settled the question very satisfactorily by saying that undoubtedly the Holy Spirit must have been the author of such a wonderful book. Yet once again it ought to be said that the evidence weighs heavily, very heavily in favour of Thomas.



The first printed edition was issued by Zainer of Augsburg in 1471, and more than one hundred editions were in circulation before the end of the fifteenth century. Since then it has been estimated that three thousand further editions have appeared. It is impossible to give exact figures as the bibliographers do not agree, but very interesting details are given by Backer, Copinger, Kettlewell, Wheatley and others.

In England alone, up to the year 1900, thirty-three separate translations came out, some of them being very popular; for example, Bishop Challoner's version in 1737 ran into eighteen editions in London, not counting other issues which came out in Dublin and Paris.

Although since 1900 one or two additional renderings have been made, still another version is wanted. It is commonly agreed, though rarely carried into practice, that each generation should have its own translation of a great book. But where is *our* version of 'The Imitation,' and what are the characteristics of the editions in circulation today?

Almost all of them—in a greater or lesser degree—use the idiom of an old-fashioned piety, or an obsolete grammatical form of language, which is or was considered appropriate for books of devotion. 'Thee' and 'thou' for 'you.' 'Thou oughtest' for 'you should,' 'bestow' for 'give,' 'full soon' for 'quickly,' 'vouchsafe' for 'permit' or 'allow,' 'sith' for 'since'—many other examples could be given. Why should this be? One probable reason is that many translators have been learned divines, steeped in conventional Christian diction, to whom such language came quite naturally. By comparing various editions, it is also evident that some writers based their translations upon previous ones and so the old traditions have been carried on. Other translations, while free from the obsolete grammatical forms, are written in the long, undulant, and some would add soporific sentences of the eighteenth century. All this creates an air of unreality, of other-worldliness; and many modern readers, especially if they have no Christian background, feel that 'The Imitation' is not for them.

Such criticism as this does not imply that all these volumes were of little value. On the contrary, some of them were of the greatest value *for their age and generation*. For example, Stanhope's 1696 translation, or loose paraphrase rather, ran into over twenty editions, and even now is in use—an empirical argument perhaps, but surely conclusive. But new translations are wanted, in the common but not necessarily commonplace speech of today, which will appeal to the people of today, the man and woman in the street or train.

The diction of any new translation must be modern, simple and incisive—no literary artifice, no seeking for effect. We may read Sir Thomas Browne's 'Christian Morals,' be charmed with its sonorous music and yet remain quite forgetful of its precepts; for

here the artist stands first, the moralist in the background. This must not be so in 'The Imitation.'

But just at this point a natural question arises: in attempting the ordinary speech of today, how far may the translator go? How colloquial may he be, what latitude will modern usage allow? Judging by a recent and well reviewed publication, 'The Odyssey,' by E. V. Rieu, which expressly claims to be a translation and not a paraphrase, the latitude is very wide; some would say dangerously so. For example: the literal 'My child, what a word has escaped the enclosure of thy teeth' becomes 'Nonsense, my child.' The literal 'devours without atonement' is rendered 'living scot-free.' With the same freedom 'Ah! the shame!' ( *ὦ πόποι* ) is changed to 'Damnation take the thing,' and 'she' (Penelope) 'scorns me' becomes 'she gives me the cold shoulder.'

Now, however appropriate this style may be for spirited narrative, evidently there is a danger of its lapsing into cheap vulgarity; and no shadow of that must fall on our great Christian classic. Yet how easy, and in some cases how tempting to indulge in slickness the following will show. In Book 3 Chapter 30 we read: 'Vanum est et inutile, de futuris conturbari . . . quæ forte nunquam evenient,' and this might be correctly translated by the wayside pulpit slogan: 'Why worry, it may never happen.' But what a degradation, and how it would repel the best type of reader. So it appears that a translator must keep to a very narrow and precarious track, between clever slickness on one side and dull conventionality on the other.

But now there is another side (there is always another side) of the question which seems to indicate that simplicity—except perhaps the simplicity of great genius—is not enough. There are some chapters, more especially in Book 4, which touch heights quite beyond the reach of the common speech of today—chapters where Christ is speaking to his followers, or his followers to their Lord. What words can be adequate for passages of such transcendent value?

The Byzantine artists, in trying to invest their subjects with the feeling of what Otto calls the 'Numinous,' developed a special hieratic technique, and depicted the human form elongated, rigid, with dilated eyes, etc. So may it not be that a special diction is required for the greatest chapters of 'The Imitation'? Ecclesiastical Latin once gave the right atmosphere, but can simple twentieth-century English do this? A difficult question. This writer is all for simplicity; but it must be simplicity informed with a glowing sincerity; and where shall that be found?

One more difficulty must be mentioned. Thomas à Kempis wrote for men dedicated to religion, who knew the Scriptures by heart, and readily apprehended every Biblical allusion. Up to, let us say, fifty years ago, a translator could rely upon his readers having at least an outline knowledge of Bible history, and some familiarity

with the Christian vocabulary. But today whole sections of the population are admittedly pagan; and how translate for them such simple words as 'gratia,' 'Trinitati' and 'manna,' to take three words only in Chapter 1 of Book 1?

Finally: in the following attempt to translate three of the easier chapters—one each from Books, 1, 2 and 3, the writer is acutely aware that he cannot fulfil his own demands; but he does honestly hope that someone with the right equipment, and what is equally important with the right spirit, will be moved to attempt this great task in spite of its great difficulties.

NOTE: Going back to the problem of the extent to which a translator may use current colloquial speech; as a sound criterion, the following question should be asked: if Thomas à Kempis were living today and writing for the men and women of today, how would he express himself? This test will be found to justify many passages which at first sight appear far too free.

## BOOK 1—CHAPTER 2

Quite naturally we all value education<sup>1</sup> highly—very highly. But education without the awareness of, and reverence for God is useless. The dullest rustic<sup>2</sup> knowing something of God, would be a finer man than an arrogant materialist who studies the laws of the universe, but remains ignorant of his own divine origin.<sup>3</sup> Deep self-knowledge invariably gives a man the poorest opinion of himself—flattery gives *him* no pleasure. If I knew all the facts in an encyclopædia,<sup>4</sup> but nothing of Divine love, how would that help me with God? He will ask for deeds, not words. Then don't make learning the end of life; it will only lead to much dissension and disappointment. The pedantic scholar wishes to appear and also to be called learned; yet there is so much knowledge of little use, indeed of no use for man's spiritual nature; and what folly to aim at anything lower than our eternal welfare! Pretentious terminology<sup>5</sup> will not satisfy man's deepest needs, but a well-ordered life brings great tranquillity of mind and a good conscience great trust in God. The greater your enlightenment the more strictly will you be judged, unless such enlightenment has led to a better way of life; so that not pride, but fear should go with any gift you possess. And should you be tempted to regard yourself as well-informed and cultured—think for a moment; there are whole libraries of which you know nothing.<sup>6</sup> Then try and forget your little learning: admit your ignorance. Why so jealous of your prestige when so many surpass you in scholarship and spiritual insight? If you are anxious to make any real progress, avoid publicity<sup>7</sup> and prefer to remain unknown.

<sup>1</sup> 'naturaliter scire desiderat.'

<sup>2</sup> 'profecto humilis rusticus.'

<sup>3</sup> Trans. by Corneille:

'Un paison stupide, et sans expérience,  
Qui perce jusqu'aux cieus sans réfléchir sur soy.'  
Qui ne sçait que t'aymer, et n'a que foy,  
Vaut mieux qu'un Philosophe enflé de la science,

<sup>4</sup> 'omnia quæ in mundo sunt.'

<sup>5</sup> 'multa verba.'

<sup>6</sup> 'sunt multa plura quæ nescis.'

<sup>7</sup> 'ama nesciri.'



Indeed, life's greatest and most useful gift is the deep humility born of true self-knowledge. Forget self, think well and highly of others—that is the way of wisdom, even of perfection.

And should you see anyone fall into sin, even gross sin, do not complacently stand yourself on a moral pedestal:<sup>8</sup> you cannot tell how long it will be before you also fall. All of us are frail, yet think no one frailer than yourself.

## BOOK 2—CHAPTER 3

Until you yourself are at peace, you cannot possibly bring it to others; and a peacemaker is of even greater value than a distinguished professor.<sup>1</sup> The irritable and hot tempered distort the most innocent words and actions. Far too readily they believe the worst; but the peaceable will see and point out the best in everything and in everybody.<sup>2</sup>

The genuinely peaceful suspect no one; but the vain and discontented are troubled incessantly with many suspicions: never at peace themselves, they will not allow others to rest in peace. They're quick enough to say things better left unsaid, but very forgetful of things that ought to be done. With a microscopic eye they examine their neighbour's duties,<sup>3</sup> but how blind they are to their own. Let such as these serve as a warning: deal first with yourself; then, and only then, will you be justified in correcting your neighbour. You know very well how to excuse yourself and to put your own conduct in the best light; yet you do not treat others in this way. It would be much better to accuse yourself and excuse others. You wish for toleration?<sup>4</sup> Then in return be considerate and charitable; for still you are far from that true charity and humility which feel anger and resentment only against self.

It is not a great thing to settle down comfortably with the good-natured—that is not difficult, for we all prefer to live in peace and are happy with those who agree with us. But to live peacefully with the coarse and stubborn, with the unprincipled, with those who oppose us in everything—ah! that is a great thing, an achievement worthy of a man.<sup>5</sup>

Yet some find it possible to be at peace with themselves and with their fellow men also. But many strike discord everywhere: a pest to others,<sup>6</sup> but a greater pest to themselves. And there are still some who not only live in peace, but are always ready and eager to pacify and reconcile the unfriendly.

Yet when all has been said, in the afflictions of life nothing but the quiet acceptance of suffering will bring us peace; and this is much to be preferred to hard insensibility. Patience in suffering

8 'non deberes te tamen meliorem aestimare.'

1 'quam bene doctus.'

3 'considerat quid alii facere tenentur.'

4 'laudamile nimis virileque factum.'

5 'laudabile nimis virileque factum.'

2 'omnia ad bonum convertit.'

4 'Si portari vis.'

6 'aliis sunt graves.'

wins great peace. The master of himself, the ruler of circumstances, the friend of Christ, and the possessor of immortality—such is that one who endures suffering patiently.

### BOOK 3—CHAPTER 24

Beware of curiosity, and keep free from trivial extraneous affairs. What are such things to you? The one, the great concern of your life must be to follow me. *You* are not responsible for this man's character, or the words and actions of that one. *You* will not be asked to reply for others, but a strict account of your own life will be demanded. Why then become entangled and hindered by such matters. Every creature and everything in the great universe<sup>1</sup> is comprehended by me. Every man is an open book to me:<sup>2</sup> I know him intimately, his thoughts, his wishes, his ambitions. Then entrust yourself entirely to my care, and let the faithless be as worried as they please. Do what they will, they cannot escape the results of their words and actions—it is impossible to evade me.

Never struggle to mix with the influential or wealthy, or take pride in the wide circle of your friends, no, not even in one chosen friend. For all such things fill the heart and mind and shut out my light and influence. If only you were fitly prepared and ready at any moment to experience my Presence, how willingly would I enlighten you and show you my deep mysteries.

Be on your guard. On no account neglect prayer, and in all your doings remember that great preservative—humility.

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## THE TRUE BASIS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

### DISCUSSION

THE exigencies of the Press prevent the collation of the various reactions to Père Nicholas's article, as we must go to press before readers have seen the second part of the article. But the discussion is already opened on a fundamental level by the following letter. Some will have thought that the original article went too far. Fr James thinks that it has not gone far enough. He may be thought to have stated the case in its extreme form; and those who disagree will be given an opportunity of replying in a subsequent issue of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*—*Editor*.

To the Editor, *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*:

Dear Sir,

The article by Fr Nicholas in the *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* raises so much that has been for so long of absorbing interest to me, that I cannot refrain from writing to you about it. You must pardon what may seem insolence on the part of a typical secular priest in

<sup>1</sup> 'quæ sub sole fiunt.

<sup>2</sup> 'scio qualiter cum unoquoque sit.'

writing about the Religious Life, but sometimes the outsider sees most of the game. I must begin by limiting my objective. All my studies and experience have been concerned with the monastic life; but, I believe, nevertheless, that what I have to say may apply with perhaps even greater force to Canons, Friars, and Clerks Regular.

It is my firm opinion that the troubles which beset modern religious spring from the new spirit that was born with the counter-reformation, informed by the humanism of the 16th century, and mummified by the disciplinary measures of Trent. This may seem a truism; but I am certain that it is not fully realised how deep is the cleavage between the spirit of pre- and post-tridentine Christianity. There have been many saints since Trent and the Counter-Reformation, and there were not a few at that period, but this I believe to have been in spite of the spirit of that time and not because of it. The study of the lives and writings of all the great saints since then shows an interesting development, quite unconscious I think, back to the pre-tridentine objectivity. Let me define what I mean by saying that I think that with the 16th century the emphasis in the spiritual life was from the object to the subject, from God to perfection. An example may make what I mean more clear. Compare the opening chapter of St Augustine's Confessions with the first chapters of St Teresa's Autobiography and you will see what I mean: St Augustine begins by singing the praises of God and St Teresa by bewailing her sins. Cassian, it is true, advises the novice to begin by fixing his intention on purity of heart like the marksman on his target, but purity of heart was, for Cassian, the pure love of God, not a way of behaving, nor yet a matter of 'acts'. The modern spiritual writer would advise us to keep our eyes fixed on our arrow or bullet or the sights of our gun. Fr Nicholas, in his article, and true to the post-tridentine spirit, speaks of the Religious Life as 'a school of perfection' (p. 13); St Benedict, on the other hand, speaks of it as 'a school of the service of God' . . . *Constituenda est ergo nobis dominici schola servitii*. Fr Nicholas speaks of the desire for perfection that animates novices and then wonders why they go, as if the desire of anything less than God could keep a novice in religion. St Benedict, on the other hand, bids the abbot test the novice to see if he is really seeking God. A different matter. The word 'perfection' in, more or less, the modern sense, is mentioned by St Benedict once when he mentions those *qui ad perfectionem conversationis festinant*. But it is not until the last chapter and does not effect my contention at all unless it be to strengthen it, for I would not suggest that Christians should not be as perfect as their Heavenly Father, but that it is the effect of seeking and finding him and not the other way round. Unfortunately I have not by me the *Consuetudines* of Guigo, but I have studied them carefully and I am sure the emphasis is the same. I should love to



continue with a thousand comparisons between patristic and post-tridentine spiritual writers, but I must bring this letter to an end, if for no other reason than that you would never read it were I to make it as long as I could. Let me then end this part of my letter by saying that *perfection is attained not by aiming at it directly and so, in a measure, seeking self; but by aiming at and seeking God.*

Now what are the results of this false emphasis that arose in the 16th century from, I am convinced, the humanistic spirit born at that time, which made man and not God the measure? The results are deplorable: they are narrowness, pettiness, nervous storms, nervous break-downs, and sad reactions, not to mention the rather horrid self-consciousness of so much modern piety. And so it must often happen that all but the toughest novices, even though they are generous and willing, do break down in the noviciate, and the break-down is nervous, because the quest for perfection has put a wrong, and utterly false emphasis on to their actions and introduced dangerous dichotomy into their lives. Were I a novice master, I would eliminate the word 'perfection' and give my novices the *Moralia* of St Gregory, the *Conferences* of Cassian, and other works of the Fathers to read. Very verbose, very irritating, they often are, but sound meat among the verbiage. Believe me it is *not* the austere institutions of your Fathers and Founders on which the spirit of your novices break, but on the constitutions of well meaning post-tridentine legislators. For every novice who goes because of long fasts and long silences, twenty go because they are made to seek a narrow idea of perfection. Fr Nicholas speaks as if to change this would be to deprive religious life of the Cross—nonsense of course. St Benedict and St Bruno, at any rate, were not occupied in devising crosses for their sons, but a way, necessarily austere because it lead *away* from the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to God.

Perhaps I have overstated my case and, at any rate, I do not claim that it is a complete answer, only an utterly vital one.

Yours ever in Xto,

BRUNO S. JAMES.

July 17. Wells-next-the-Sea.

## REVIEWS

THE TRINITY AND CHRISTIAN DEVOTION. By Charles W. Lowry.  
(Eyre and Spottiswoode; 4s. 6d.)

The need for correlating the life of prayer and the intellectual life is as urgent as it is modern. Lack of systematic teaching, many believe, is responsible for any excessive outcrop of irrelevant devotions which distract the soul from the fundamental principles of Christian theology and bring about a disintegrating rift between prayer and life. Not that we imagine St Augustine or St Thomas settling down to half an hour's meditation neatly planned in a cut-and-dried fashion and based on the *Confessions* or the *Summa*. Prayer is not a supplementary exercise in speculative theology; but if it is to be fruitful, that is to say, if it is to provide the best natural basis on which grace can mould the Christian character, it must proceed from the dogmas of the Church in much the same way that a skilled craftsman's work will, instinctively rather than consciously, be directed by his knowledge of his tools and materials.

Dr Lowry attempts in this book to start the work of reconciliation from the most fundamental of all dogmas, the Trinity; the Christian life is ultimately a reflection of the internal life of the Godhead. Taking an eclectic stand he considers the true relation of doctrine and devotion, looks for statements of the doctrine of the Trinity in the history of the church, and then sets out to define the doctrine itself. The early part of the book offers several neat and unbiassed summaries of the teaching of various 'leaders of thought' from Arius to Hegel, and this impartiality is representative of the book as a whole. Its scale of values is so vaguely outlined that on some pages the reader is compelled to ask whether any dogmas are accepted at all. Eclecticism has that quality. This must account for a statement which, on its face value (and it appears in its context to have no other), is startling: 'Christian thought today has either to base itself on the Athanasian position or go back to the beginning and work out something like Arianism or simple adoptionism' (p. 63). This follows close after a defence of the teaching of St Athanasius.

What partiality there is favours subjective definitions. Religion 'is a form of experience. It is primarily a sense or feeling or consciousness' (p. 14). This is the starting point for the investigation of dogma. Again, devotion is 'feeling within one's being the reality and knowing within one's will the force of

"that devotedness, in short,

Which I account the ultimate in man"' (p. 103.)

And 'Christianity, it has been said, is the experience of belonging to Jesus Christ' (p. 105). The difficulty seems to be that in a book

which demands a dogmatic basis there is no final objective court of appeal in which to seek dogmas, and it is not surprising to find Wordsworth the poet-theologian par excellence: 'He was right psychologically in his understanding of religion and religious experience' (p. 14).

Nevertheless many important terms are not given even a subjective definition. Freedom—we are left to chew on this: 'The attribute of freedom is qualified by the impulse to surrender and obey' (p. 47). Original sin is neither expressly affirmed nor denied, biblical inspiration and revelation are confused and sketchily analysed and, oddest of all in a treatise *De Deo Trino*, analogy is only dimly outlined: 'It is more reasonable to face and accept the fact that every resort to analogy in trying to think about God ends in symbolic and mythical representation than it is to pretend that pure reason yields valid and satisfactory conclusions in theology' (pp. 95-6). However, as it weaves a 'way deftly if clumsily between the Scylla of extreme Protestantism and the Charybdis of unmitigated Catholicism' (p. 76), this book has something which Dr G. M. Trevelyan assures us is common to Shakespeare and Elizabethan England, 'an attitude to religion that is not primarily Catholic or Protestant, Puritan or Anglican, but evades dogma and lives broadly in the spirit'.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

HIPPOLYTE DE ROME: LA TRADITION APOSTOLIQUE. Edited by Dom B. Botte, O.S.B. Sources Chrétiennes, 11. (Editions du Cerf; 70 fr.)

For those who are not specialists in textual criticism, this edition will be most welcome. It contains the Latin text of the *Apostolic Tradition*, together with a French translation, in which the gaps in the Latin version are filled from the Sahidic, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions. There are adequate notes on the text thus supplied. A concise introduction outlines the history of the text and gives some account of the principal Church Orders and the editions of the *Apostolic Tradition*. The editor is abreast of the most recent work on Hippolytus. The French translation is not always satisfactory; for example, the rendering of the blessing of cheese and olives weakens its significance by a too great freedom. Otherwise this is an addition to the series *Sources Chrétiennes* which should be popular among students of the liturgy. The format is good, as always in this collection.

A. R.



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**A** NEW venture in Dominican publishing begins this month, September, 1946. A publishing house, modelled in small scale on the French Dominican *Editions du Cerf*, is being set up at Blackfriars, St Giles, Oxford, in order to contribute to the apostolate of the Press and to put into the hands of an Apostolic Order an instrument important for the work in England and English speaking countries. It begins, as we have said, on a very small scale, but its principle activities will include:

¶ THE ENGLISH AGENCY for the publications of *Les Editions du Cerf*. To enable English readers to purchase easily with English money the great number of books and periodicals produced by the French house.

¶ THE PUBLICATION of the two reviews, *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* and *BLACKFRIARS* which have been brought to prominence through the generous and altruistic services of Mr Basil Blackwell. We are leaving him with gratitude and regret and setting up on our own.

¶ THE PUBLICATION of many BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS, as well as Dominican liturgical books for use in England.

By the end of September THREE NEW BOOKS will have appeared:

- (1) **Whatsoever He Shall Say.** The First Theophila Correspondence. By Ferdinand Valentine, O.P.
- (2) **Fr Vincent McNabb: Varia** (Sermons and Papers) with an Introduction by Gerald Vann, O.P.
- (3) **The Condemnation of St Thomas at Oxford.** By Daniel Callus, O.P., D.Phil. AQUINAS PAPER No. 5

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